

My Dear Friend
W L Garrison.



Oakland, O. Jan'y 28th 1847

By any means which I can conscientiously employ in the transmission of this letter, it will probably reach you after the subject upon which it treats, shall have become stale, and worn, nevertheless, I feel impelled both by regard for you and for the welfare of others to pen it. When I am called a Garrison abolitionist by those who intend to convey obloquy and reproach by the term, I rejoice at it, as an evidence that I have been in a measure faithful to the cause of Humanity in some directions in which it is unpopular to be so, and I cannot but feel high respect and regard for the man whose greater faithfulness or more transcendent ability has caused his name to be given as a designation of a certain portion of his fellows. I should scorn however voluntarily to adopt the title and with it the idea that I am the follower of a leader, whose opinions I am to receive as infallible, and because he teaches many valuable and important truths, that he may not also adopt and promulgate serious errors, which it may become my duty as much to eschew and expose as if his general course were not so correct and useful. If therefore in what follows there shall seem to be somewhat of sharpness and severity of rebuke, accept it not as proceeding from a desire to find fault, but from the wish to help you forward to a greater degree of usefulness, and consequently happiness.

In common with nearly every friend of yours, and of the slave, with whom I have conversed, I was deeply pained by your participation in, and justification of, the "ransom of Douglas." In the Liberator of January, 18th you say, "Now for me, I never have argued and never have believed that it is morally wrong to secure the liberation of a slave, by paying the sum demanded by the slaveholder." And quoth, after you recollect by a quotation your belief that "no compensation should be given to the planters emancipating their slaves, because it would be a surrender of the great fundamental principle that man cannot hold property in man &c &c." When it appears you do not consider it morally wrong to "surrender this great fundamental principle"? You are opposed it is true to compensation "in the abstract," like so many of our fellow men are opposed to slavery, but if the right persons, for right objects, in the right manner, tender the compensation, you not only make no objection, but are ready to assist in it!! Have we not all heard of owning the slave for the slave's good? Or not this the right persons, for right objects, and in a right manner becoming slaveholders, and of course perfectly justifiable? Your shewing of this case of Douglas informs us of two at least of those particulars which render the transaction right. First it was sought to pay for him if he could be had at "a fair market-value"!! By whom and by what rule was the "market value" of Frederick Douglas ascertained? Was he estimated as a cotton growing a sugar raising slave with a certain amount of bone and muscle, or a smart handy gentleman's waiter? If so, was not \$750. greatly too much? Or I don't doubt whether "master should" a master any one else would consider him worth a slave for any such purposes. If valued for his intellectual and moral worth was it not greatly too little? In this aspect of the case the transaction would certainly appear undecent, did not other considerations render it too unbecoming for notice. But he was to be bought provided he could be had at his "fair market-value". Suppose this ascertained and yet master should unwilling to relinquish his "claim" for that amount, would the "right manner" of compensating have required these friends of his to have stopped at that? The other particular, helping to render compensation for slaves proper and justifiable, which we have learned is in regard to the persons who may do it, they must be the "clearsighted long-tried uncompromising friends of emancipation." I suppose they must be also those who have always denied in words the propriety of compensation. ~~He has forgotten.~~

Although I believe Frederick Douglas has indignantly been shown a portion of the strength he has heretofore wielded for the deliverance of our brethren in bonds - in opposition too to what were his convictions of right when with us in Ohio, in 1844, when he asserted he would not consent to the purchase of a brother or sister from bondage - although I think a great fundamental principle has been sacrificed in the matter, which must for a time have a retarding influence upon the cause of emancipation, yet the act with its probable consequences appears to me unimportant, compared with the evil, likely to flow from the philosophy by which it is attempted to be justified, promulgated with the influence which the man who uses it, and the sheet in which it appears, are likely to give it. Had William L Garrison asserted "I never have argued and never have believed it is morally wrong to hold slaves; every thing depends upon the manner in which, the objects for

which, and the persons by whom" they are held, I could scarcely have been more surprised or pained than at the position which he has assumed. Here, openly and undisguisedly, stands out the doctrine which has practically been lived in all the past history of man, cursing the world with the social and moral evils which afflict it. "The end justifies the means." I beseech you dear brother to look at it again and see if it be not so. See if you are not in this, teaching a complete departure from principle and adoption of expediency as the guide to conduct. You declare that no compensation should be given to ^{the} planters, ^{who emancipate} and assign ^{innocent} reasons in support of the position, then join with others in compensating upon the idea that your motives, your manner of doing it, and it being you who do it makes it all right. By such a philosophy as this President Polk and his coadjutors can demonstrate completely the rightfulness of the Mexican war, and no wrong exists under the sun which may not equally be justified. Let us see if this be not a legitimate conclusion from the premises you have afforded. You and I, with others, maintain that human life should be held inviolate. That it can never be taken by human means except through the commission of crime. A Frederick Douglass or a Madison Washington with numerous others, may find themselves in a position where it appears impossible to secure liberty for themselves and their posterity except by the commission of a murder. You and I assist in it, then justify it by an appeal to our motives, the manner in which it was done and ^{the persons} by whom. Suppose we disclaim all the time the rightfulness of killing - shall we not be committing an act not only justifiable, but commendable? Are not the cases fairly parallel? Perhaps you will say, no, for their consequences will be so different. How can we calculate what may be the evil consequences to Auld and his coadjutors of the practical admission of his right to compensation? And to all posterity? And here allow me to remark upon your idea that your "express disclaimer" of the right of Hugh Auld to demand compensation alters the ^{moral} transaction. Do you suppose he believes your words in contradiction to your act? He cannot do it, were he to try. The evidence to him and his brother slaveholders is irresistible, that your denial of his right to compensation is all make-believe. When you perceive a man making loud professions of his love to God and Christ, and of his zeal for the Christianization of mankind, whose life is a daily violation of the precepts and example of Jesus, do you believe his professions? You take his acts for the measure of his belief, not his words, and so do Hugh Auld and the slaveholders take yours. The consequences to be apprehended are a greater tenacity of grasp

upon their sisters and the necessity for a longer contest of truth with
the errors they have imbibed before they will yield to her dominion.
I believe that you acted from very benevolent motives but that
you have made a great mistake. If you can but see it so, I have
no doubt you have magnanimity enough to acknowledge the error, but
I will tell you what I fear. The vast amount of good you have been
instrumental in effecting, your consciousness of general purity of
motive, and the applause sometimes almost amounting to adulation
heaped upon you by admiring friends, I fear have combined to affect
your character with a predisposition to esteem your opinions nearly
infallible, and I hardly expect you can review your position in
regard to this matter sufficiently unprejudiced to see it as it really
is. Kindly and affectionately I would remark that your claim that this
act is right because done by Thompson Anna Richardson, yourself
and others is an evidence of the predisposition to which I allude. Circum-
stanced as you are it is scarcely possible for you to steer your bark
wide of that rock, yet I would fain help you to do it if I could.
No doubt this affair will be made the subject of disparaging remarks
and misrepresentation by such as hate you. With such persons
or their efforts I cannot sympathize. But I should not feel
that I were doing towards you what I would have you do to me,
with opportunity, I were to omit the expressing of my feelings.
May you attain "clear-sightedness" to perceive any errors you
may entertain, as I hope you have moral courage enough
to acknowledge and overcome them.

I would be glad to feel assured that Frederick Douglass
had no connexion even by tacit approval with this transaction.
That his native attachment to principle continues unswerving
by selfish considerations, and the influence of the example of
those of high name in the cause of humanity, actuated by kind
impulses to mistaken practice. It would be another proof added
to the many he has heretofore given of almost unparelled
greatness and goodness -
yours affectionately A Brooke

William L Garrison
Boston
Massachusetts